LETTERS TO A LADY,

EMBODYING

A Popular Sketch of the History of Architecture,

AND THE CHARACTERISTICS OF

THE VARIOUS STYLES WHICH HAVE PREVAILED.*

My dear Sorillah:

SHORT as this series of gossipping letters yet is, parts of it have been written in widely different places, and under very varied circumstances. I begin the present communication tied by a disaster to a sofa, and sighing for a little exercise and fresh air. To be kept from motion even for a fortnight,—to lose "the bloom and ravishment of spring" for that period,—is not a trifle. Like all things, however, it has its good. It is under such circumstances that one discovers the kindness of friends and the value of *books*. Books,—the wonderful gateway, if I may so speak, by which you get admittance to the Past,—the means by which you obtain a knowledge of the great ones of all time, travel to all nations, and become, so to speak, omnipresent. Books will take you from the unpleasant present; sooth, teach, elevate; will bring back what has gone by, and show the way to a glorious future. However, it is not either to lament or to apostrophize that I now take the pen in my hand, but to continue our brief review of the History that has been written by succeeding nations in Brick and Stone. The pyramids of Egypt, the temples of Greece, the forum and triumphal arches of Rome, the sky-pointing spires of the Middle Ages, the palaces of the Revival, represent and illustrate the mind and manners of the people by whom they were erected with unquestionable truth and force. Let us, however, continue the journey step by step.

With reference to a sentence in the general view which I gave in my last of some of the principal buildings in ancient Rome, you say you do not remember an arch of Trajan in Rome. Trajan did erect an arch in his Forum at Rome: it was despoiled to assist in erecting the arch of Constantine; but the arch to which I referred, as having, in conjunction with a column, made his name known to all ears, is at Ancona, and is one of the most complete monuments of Roman art remaining to us.

There was one important class of buildings in ancient Rome which I did not mention: I mean the *Basilicæ*, which are particularly interesting to us, because many of them were converted into Christian churches in the reign of Constantine, and became the model for the earliest edifices that were afterwards expressly built for Christian worshippers. The term **basilica**, indeed, lost its original signification, and came to mean a church.

The ancient Roman Basilica served as a Court of Law, and an Exchange for men of business: it afforded, too, ample space for a fashionable promenade, of which the Romans were fond; but whether or not the Roman ladies ever used it as a place to show their "blond" bonnets and lilac gloves, and nod to their friends, as ours do at the "Horticultural," seems uncertain. The term probably came from Greece, but there is not a vestige in that country now of any edifice of the sort. The Greeks called their second archon or magistrate, *Archon Basileus* (basileus was their term for king), and his court was the basilica. The first basilica in Rome was built by Cato, 184 years B.C. Twenty others were afterwards erected. The ground plan of all these buildings was rectangular, and this area was mostly divided into three parts, consisting of a nave and two side aisles, each separated from the centre by a single row of columns. Sometimes there was a double aisle on each side. At one end was the tribunal for the judge, either square or circular, and sometimes projecting from the end as an apsis.

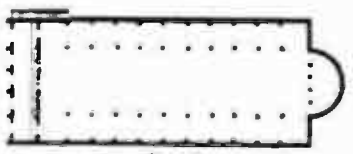

FIG. 19.

You doubtless remember the basilica at Pompeii. Fig. 19 is the plan of such a building, and you will see at once how closely the type has been followed in our churches. The side-aisles, which in the earliest basilica were merely open porticoes, were sometimes in two stories, and the upper gallery thus formed, served to receive crowds of loiterers. The Basilica Ulpia, or Basilica of Trajan, had two aisles on each side, was roofed with bronze, and was one of the most important works in Rome.

Some scholars deny that the Roman basilica had its name from Greece; and one, Zestermann, shows that the adjective *basilicus* was used in Rome as synonymous with *eximius* and *magnificus*, and that Cato, in conferring this name on his new building, merely meant to say that it was the *royal* edifice,—the unparalleled one. I have given an undue space to this class of buildings, but its connection with the structures that followed will serve as a reason.

You will have observed that the Romans introduced a new element into architectural composition, which led to very important results, namely, the ARCH. By means of this they were enabled to span larger openings than they could by placing horizontal stones from column to column, and with very ordinary materials to roof-in large areas, and produce very surprising effects. It was long maintained that neither the Egyptians nor the Greeks were acquainted with the properties of the arch. Instances of its use in Egypt, at a very remote period, however, exist.

Sir G. Wilkinson thinks brick arches were used in the tombs as early as 1540, B.C. At Saqqara there is a stone arch ascribed to 600 B.C. Perring mentions an arch in the portico of a pyramid at Meroe, which he believes as old as 700 B.C. In the Assyrian marbles of earlier date now in the British Museum, the arched form will be observed, and there is on one of the slabs even what would seem to be a bridge with arches.

Let this be as it may, it is clear that the Egyptians did not make general use of the arch, and the same may be said of the Greeks up to the time of Alexander. The Treasury of Atreus, before alluded to, one of the earliest buildings in Greece, was at first sight supposed to present a perfect example of a vault; but on minute examination, it was found to be covered by stones, lapping one over another, the underside of which had been afterwards cut into a domical shape. Fig. 20 will explain this to you. In Etruria there is a tomb supposed to date 600 years before our era, which is covered in the same way. In Ireland there are some very early subterranean chambers similarly constructed. This arrangement of a vault is not of itself a proof that the nations using it were ignorant of the principle of a real arch. The simple fact that Sir Christopher Wren used over-lapping stones in preference to a proper vault, to place the spires on at the top of his principal towers (those of Bow Church and St. Bride's) would disprove that idea.

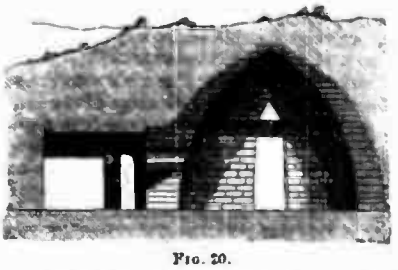

FIG. 20.

At the entrance to the great Pyramid, you will remember, the weight is taken off the opening by two stones placed triangularly, and leaning against each other at the top. The same thing is seen in the Cyclopean walls of Tiryns, where there is a gallery so covered; also, in the Mexican pyramids, and in some buildings in England ascribed to the Saxons.

It is in Rome, as I said, that we first find the real arch generally used, and here it led to an entire revolution in architectural arrangement. It will be well for you to bear it in mind as one of the striking differences between Greek and Roman architecture.

Of the differences in other respects, let me now say a few words. The Doric, the Ionic, and the Corinthian of the Greeks were adopted by the Romans, and they added a modification of the Doric, called *Tuscan*, and one of the Corinthian, called *Composite*. At one time these latter were accepted as distinct varieties, and it was the practice to speak of "the *five* orders." We are contented now to acknowledge three. You will recognise them in Roman work by the peculiarities already pointed out (Greek artists helped to produce them), but you will find them far inferior in beauty to their prototypes, excepting the Corinthian, which, as in the Temple of Jupiter Stator, in the Campo Vaccino at Rome, has an elegance wholly its own. The mouldings of the Romans are less beautiful, the columns more attenuated. One very observable difference, easily remembered, between Greek Doric and Roman Doric, is this, that in the latter *the triglyph is placed over the centre of the column*, while in the Grecian examples, as you will see in Fig. 15, a triglyph is placed *at each end of the entablature*, and others at regular intervals in the space between. The Grecian Doric has no base, nor had some of the best ancient examples of Roman Doric, but it was so generally adopted, nevertheless, that it is considered as belonging to the Italian version of the style.

Of the Corinthian capital, with its two rows

* No. IX. See also pp. 100, 133, 164, 196, 228, 260, 292, and 324.

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